

H.767

An act relating to adopting the ThinkVermont Innovation Initiative

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. THINKVERMONT INNOVATION INITIATIVE

(a) Purpose.

(1) The ThinkVermont Innovation Initiative is created to respond to the growth needs of Vermont small businesses with 20 or fewer employees by funding innovative strategies that accelerate small business growth and meet the project criteria specified in this section.

(2) The Initiative shall enable the State to invest in projects with grants that can be accessed more quickly and with fewer restrictions than traditional federal initiatives.

(b) Process; grant distribution.

(1) The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development, in consultation with the Vermont Economic Progress Council shall:

(A) adopt a schedule and process for accepting, reviewing, and approving grant proposals on a competitive basis;

(B) distribute grants across geographic areas of the State; and

(C) distribute grants across diverse industries, sectors, and business types, including for-profit and nonprofit organizations.

(2)(A) A grant shall provide funding in only one fiscal year.

(B) A recipient shall be eligible for a grant through the Initiative in not more than two fiscal years.

(c) Funding; matching requirements.

(1) The Secretary shall reserve not less than 10 percent of the funding through the Initiative for microgrants of not more than \$10,000.00.

(2) The Secretary shall require a grant recipient to provide matching funds for a grant as follows:

(A) for a microgrant reserved under subdivision (3) of this subsection, a funding match of 25 percent of the value of the grant; and

(B) for all other grants, a funding match of 100 percent of the value of the grant.

(d) Eligibility criteria. To be eligible for a grant, a project shall:

(1) provide workforce training that is not eligible for funding through another State or federal program and that serves an immediate employer need to fill one or more job vacancies;

(2) enable a business to attract, retain, or support remote workers in Vermont;

(3) establish or enhance a facility that attracts small companies or remote workers, or both, including generator and maker spaces, co-working spaces, remote work hubs, and innovation spaces, with special emphasis on facilities that promote colocation of nonprofit, for-profit, and government entities;

(4) enable or support deployment of broadband telecommunications connectivity;

(5) leverage economic development funding outside State government, including the federal New Market Tax Credit program and Small Business Innovation Research grants;

(6) support growth in Vermont's aerospace, aviation, or aviation technology sectors; or

(7) provide technical assistance to support small business growth.

(e) Outcomes; measures. The Secretary shall adopt measures to evaluate a grant to determine its impact, including job growth measured at one-, three-, and five-year intervals.

(f) Appropriation. In fiscal year 2019, the amount of \$400,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to implement the ThinkVermont Innovation Initiative pursuant to this section.

Sec. 2. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2018.